



Rough Sleeping Estimates Toolkit 2020

Forms and resources for Homeless Link verifiers

Let's end homelessness together

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Full toolkit available at:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/rough-sleeping-estimates

Homeless Link code of conduct for count verifiers

Introduction

Count-based estimates are verified, in person, to ensure that they have been carried out safely and in accordance with the Homeless Link [guidance](#). Verifiers are trained and supported by Homeless Link.

Count verifiers are associates, employees or representatives of Homeless Link or its partner voluntary sector organisations, and are acting as representatives of Homeless Link.

It is important that Homeless Link's good reputation is maintained and that our members, partners, stakeholders and the public can rely on all people representing Homeless Link to act with respect and integrity and in keeping with our values. Homeless Link therefore believes that the conduct of its representatives should be of a high standard. The purpose of this code is to provide clear guidance on the standards expected from everyone.

No code of conduct can cover all circumstances that may arise. The code tries to emphasise positive standards of performance and behaviour rather than making a list of rules or possible breaches. However, all representatives should be aware that breaches of the code will be investigated and action will be taken where considered appropriate.

Verification of rough sleeping count-based estimates

- Verifiers must deliver verification of the count, as set out in the toolkit, to a high standard
- Ensure conduct reflects Homeless Link's equal opportunities policy and that they are in line with the aims and mission of Homeless Link
- Ensure you have fully read and understood the current definitions and toolkit
- Confirm the date of the count with both the local authority lead and Count Coordinator
- Speak to Homeless Link's Counts & Estimates Project Manager and the Count Coordinator at the relevant local authority prior to the night of the count
- Send the completed verification form to Homeless Link's Counts & Estimates Project Manager: verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk promptly on your next working day after the count
- Notify Homeless Link's Project Manager if you have any problems communicating with the Count Coordinator or confirming the details of the count.

Expenses

- Verifiers are either acting in a voluntary capacity or are employed by Homeless Link to verify the count. The local authority does not pay the verifier for their service, other than travel after the count.
- Homeless Link will pay expenses for verifiers and, where agreed in advance, reimburse their time. The Local Authority is expected to arrange and pay for verifiers' travel back from the count e.g. taxi to home/hotel.
- Where the verifier requires time off following the count this should be agreed in advance between the verifier and their line manager where they are employed. It is not the responsibility of Homeless Link.

Attendance and cancellation

- Verifiers must confirm the date, time and venue for the count in advance with the local authority lead and Count Coordinator and notify Homeless Link if this has not been done two weeks before the count.

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- Verifiers are expected to arrive earlier than other counters, at a time agreed with the Count Coordinator, to talk through the plan for the count. Punctuality is expected, barring exceptional circumstances.
- Verifiers must ensure that they make every effort to attend the count once agreed with Homeless Link and the local authority. If they are unable to attend due to serious unforeseen circumstances, then they must inform the local authority and Homeless Link at the earliest possible opportunity so that an alternative verifier can be found.

Violence, harassment and bullying

Homeless Link will not tolerate any of the following forms of behaviour:

- Acts of violence, threatening behaviour, verbal abuse or malicious cruelty by any employee towards a colleague, representative of a member agency or working contact.
- Bullying, defined as unwanted behaviour that a person finds intimidating, undermining, belittling, embarrassing, humiliating or offensive and which is unacceptable by normal standards and is disadvantageous to the individual. Bullying may be persistent or an isolated incident.
- Harassment, a form of bullying which is usually motivated by a dislike on the part of a perpetrator of one or more perceived characteristics of the victim. Harassment is defined in discrimination legislation as 'unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the complainant's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment for the complainant'. This would include harassment on the grounds of sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, gender reassignment, or any other grounds.

Honesty, integrity and avoidance of conflicts of interest

- High standards of integrity and honesty are expected at all times. This includes being truthful and honest when asked appropriate questions about any matters which have a bearing on you as a representative of Homeless Link.
- Documents and records should be completed truthfully and accurately.
- Authority should not be abused in relation to a colleague, client or applicant for Homeless Link's positions. You should not use your official position improperly for private gain or for the gain of relatives and associates.
- Conflict of interests arises when a representative has a financial or personal interest, kinship or relationship, or engages in any activity (paid or unpaid) which could:
 - enable him/her to secure some personal advantage (other than salary) or advantage for a close relative as a result of his/her representing Homeless Link;
 - influence his/her judgement in relation to the performance of his/her duties on behalf of Homeless Link. This includes making decisions that are not in the interests of Homeless Link;
 - influence their ability to make a contribution to the work of the organisation;
 - inhibit free discussion;
 - give the impression that Homeless Link has acted improperly; or
 - have an impact on the reputation of Homeless Link.
- For a conflict of interest to arise, the advantage does not have to be realised. You have a duty to be aware of and declare any interests or potential conflict of interests and to take steps to resolve any conflicts that may arise.
- You should not place yourself under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence you in the performance of your verification activity.

Alcohol and drugs

- You should not be under the influence of alcohol or non-prescribed drugs during the count and verification process. Representatives on prescribed medication should inform the local authority if they have been prescribed medication which may affect their performance or other people's safety. There may be times when verifiers need to use non-prescription medication such as painkillers or anti-histamines, in which case you are responsible for exercising caution in taking such medication and making sure that the performance of your duties or the integrity of Homeless Link is not detrimentally affected.
- Taking or possessing illegal drugs whilst carrying out verification duties is prohibited.

Health and safety

- It is the statutory duty of all representatives to take reasonable care for their own and colleagues' health and safety and to co-operate with the local authority, to enable its statutory duties to be performed. Full health and safety guidelines should be made available to you.
- It is your responsibility to familiarise yourself with and comply with the Health & Safety guidance in the Rough Sleeping Estimates Toolkit for the count.
- **COVID-19:**
 - You should carry with you a suitable [face covering](#) and [hand sanitiser](#).
 - Follow Government guidance on [travelling safely](#) to/from count patches and when travelling back to your home/hotel.
 - You must be COVID-19 [symptom free](#) in order to attend the count. All verifiers should follow the guidance on [how to volunteer safely](#).
 - Follow the [social distancing](#) guidelines at all times.

Diversity and equality

- Homeless Link wholeheartedly supports diversity and the principle of equal opportunities and as such opposes all forms of unfair discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, age, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, Aids or HIV status, current or past experience of homelessness, marital status or disability. This is not an exhaustive list.
- We expect all representatives to create an environment that is supportive of everyone and does not illegally or unfairly discriminate against any employee or client on the grounds of that person's race, gender, marital status, religion, disability, age, sexuality or HIV status, or any other form of unfair discrimination.

Confidentiality

- Details of individuals should be kept strictly confidential and not revealed to anyone outside of the project team. The verification form must be completed on the night of the count and returned to the Coordinator on your next working day.
- Please keep information about the time and date of the count confidential. Publicity can worry some people sleeping rough and they may avoid their usual areas on the night if they know a count is taking place, and not be counted as a result.

FAQs for count verifiers

Who should lead on planning a count?

Each local authority should have a lead responsible for managing the process. They may delegate the detailed management to a Count Coordinator, who might be the local authority rough sleeping coordinator, Housing Options manager or outreach team leader.

The role of the Verifier is to observe the count and ask questions, not to take responsibility for how it is organised or lead on the count. Additional support/guidance in planning the count can be requested from Homeless Link in advance of the count, but will only be provided in a small number of cases and not by volunteers.

What if there are unusual circumstances that may impact on numbers?

Unusual and unforeseen circumstances may impact on numbers. Unusual circumstances could include extreme weather conditions – such as activation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), heavy rains or flooding – or manmade events such as riots or protests.

If the planned count coincides with unusual circumstances, in particular the operation of SWEP, the Count Coordinator in consultation with the Verifier and Homeless Link's Project Manager may decide on one of the following courses of action:

- Postpone the count – it still has to happen by 30th November 2020
- Proceed as a spotlight count that is used to inform an evidence-based estimate meeting, based on actual numbers counted plus others, such as people in SWEP provision on the night of the count, who would otherwise have slept rough.¹ This is the most common approach due to the strict Oct-Nov timeframe.
- Cancel the count and instead follow the evidence-based estimate meeting process, based on a single typical night before 30th November where SWEP is not in force. You will need to follow the guidance as part of the Rough Sleeping Estimates Toolkit and plan an estimate meeting with partners.

What contact should I have with the local authority prior to the count?

Verifiers are trained and supported by Homeless Link. We ask that local authorities and the Count Coordinator contact Homeless Link at least one month before the planned count date to book a verifier. We ask that the local authority provides you with information about the date, time and location of the count at least 3 weeks prior. We suggest that you clarify the exact date with the local authority to avoid misunderstanding, always using 'the night of x into the morning of x' to ensure clarity, even if the count starts after midnight (e.g. night of 15th into morning of 16th October). If you do not hear from the local authority, please inform Homeless Link at the earliest opportunity: verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk

Should I count on the night?

It is helpful if the Verifier doubles up as a counter to observe the way the counting is carried out. However, if the verifier is counting, then the Count Coordinator must ensure that the segment you are assigned to is local to the meeting/debriefing venue so that you are in the first team to return, or you are given transport to get back to the count base before the first team returns. The Verifier must be present to observe receipt of the Rough Sleeping Count Form from each returning count team. You should remind the Coordinator of this

¹ If an estimate is submitted on the basis of a count alongside actual number placed in SWEP, assessment and intelligence information must be used to ensure that only those people who would have slept rough on that night are counted, which might be different to the total number of people in SWEP

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requirement prior to the night of the count and check on arrival – it is often overlooked and makes it harder to do a full verification.

How should counting take place in areas that are difficult to access?

Local authorities are asked to plan ahead to gain access to non-public areas (e.g. hospital or college grounds, parks, building stairwells) on the night of the count if these are places where people may be bedded down. In previous years some local authorities have reacted to intelligence and obtained keys to areas such as stairwells where people were likely to be sleeping, which led to a thorough check of these areas. This is an issue that the Verifier should raise with the Count Coordinator either prior to or on the night of the count to ask what action has been taken. The Count Coordinator should involve the police or other local partners, such as park rangers, to gain access to areas and ensure a robust count.

If areas cannot be accessed, but there appears to be evidence of rough sleeping from other sources (i.e. encampments in rural areas or derelict buildings), then you may want to recommend that the local authority seeks advice from Homeless Link about whether the local authority should plan in advance to complete an alternative approach, such as the evidence-based estimate, including a spotlight count, that will provide a more accurate figure in this particular case. If this information comes to light during the count, take notes and speak with Homeless Link as a decision will be needed about whether the approach should be changed in order to be verified.

If an intervention takes place for someone sleeping rough on the night, are they still counted?

It is strongly recommended that prior arrangements are made to ensure that emergency beds or access to an assessment hub are available for people found on the count who express the desire to move off the streets. If people sleeping rough are supported with any intervention on the night of the count (including referral to an assessment hub/shelter, use of the emergency services or referral to SWEP or other emergency provision) then they should still be counted as bedded down at the point the count was undertaken and recorded within the single figure.

When do I fill out the Count Verification Form?

You should note the single figure and demographic data (see verification forms on the [webpage](#)) on the night, along with key information about the process. Although you will be asking questions and observing on the night of the count, we advise that you finish completing the Count Verification Form on your next working day following the count, to allow you to reflect on the process. Please type up the form.

You should return the completed form promptly to Homeless Link's Counts & Estimates Project Manager, who will review the information before sending it back to the local authority: verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk

Please remind the local authority lead and count coordinator that the single figure and demographic data must not be uploaded onto the DELTA system until the reviewed form has been received from the Homeless Link Counts & Estimates Project Manager.

What should I do if I have any concerns about the conduct of the count or the accuracy of the single figure?

If you have any concerns about any aspect of the count, please raise this with the local authority lead and/or Count Coordinator on the night if you feel comfortable doing so. Record your concerns on the Count Verification Form and discuss the issue with Homeless Link's Counts & Estimates Project Manager. The decision to verify is made by Homeless Link.

If you have any further questions or queries that have not been covered in this document, please email verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk to talk to the Homeless Link Counts & Estimates Project Manager.